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ABSTRACT

The Educational Sign Skills Evaluation (ESSE) was developed to provide a means of identifying the dominant signing style of an individual and to provide feedback on areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. It provides an overall expressive skills rating as well as information on the type, level, and degree of understanding demonstrated receptively and a sign-to-voice rating for both English-related signing and signing in American Sign-Language. Data are presented that demonstrate the reliability and validity of the evaluation. Evaluation costs and time requirements are also discussed. (JDD)

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THE E.S.S.E.
(Educational Sign Skills Evaluation)

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THE E.S.S.E.
(Educational Sign Skills Evaluation)

I. WHY THE E.S.S.E?

Today roughly 67% of schools and classes for deaf children use some form of sign communication. The Center for Assessment and Demographic Studies at Gallaudet University reports that over 75% of deaf students now attend day or mainstream programs. Many receive the services either of a teacher of adeaf students or of an educational interpreter. Yet relatively few of these individuals have received an assessment of their signing skills ---whether their ability to express themselves in signs or to understand children who sign to them. No state evaluates teacher signing skills prior to certification as a teacher of deaf students, and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf does not evaluate for signing skills in an elementary or secondary school setting. Accordingly, many teachers and educational interpreters serving deaf students have no documentation of the level of their skill or of the type of sign communication they use. This information is of importance not only to the teacher or interpreter who wishes to upgrade skills, but to administrators who hire and parents seeking appropriate placements for their children.

The E.S.S.E was developed to provide a means of identifying the dominant signing style of an individual and to provide meaningful, helpful feedback on areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. It provides an overall expressive skills rating as well as information on the type, level, and degree of understanding demonstrated receptively and a sign-to-voice rating for both English-related signing and signing in American Sign Language.

II. WHAT IS THE E.S.S.E.?

The ESSE is actually several different evaluation tools: the ESSE:T, ESSE:I, ESSE:R, and ESSE:S-V.

The ESSE:R is a videotaped evaluation of the ability of an individual to <u>understand</u> *three different types of signing*: American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Sign English (PSE) and Signing Exact English (SEE) at *three different levels (basic, intermediate, and advanced).* Two forms (A and B) are available. The basic level uses simple vocabulary at a fairly slow pace; the intermediate level presents a higher level of vocabulary and a faster pace; the advanced level includes fairly sophisticated vocabulary at a normal rate. The signers are deaf high school students. Each student presents two warmup sentences and ten test sentences. Individuals taking the evaluation write, in English, what they understood the sentence to be. A grid presents the results in terms of the percent of actual signs understood and the percent of sentence meanings grasped for each modality at each level:

Level	PSE Signs	PSE Sentences	SEE Signs	SEE Sentences	ASL Signs	ASL Sentences
Basic						
Intermediate						
Advanced						

The ESSE: I consists of videotaped samples of actual classroom teachers which an educational interpreter is asked to interpret as he/she would to students. The interpreter is given a choice of elementary school, middle school, or high school classes. Two forms, A and B, are available at each level. Once the school level is established, a warmup tape is shown of similar classes. The interpreter is videotaped while interpreting three classes, in different subject areas and with different teachers, each between 3 and 4 minutes in length. This videotape of the interpreter is viewed by a trained panel of five members familiar with a variety of signing styles and with education at the K-12 levels. Each of the five panelists completes a rating form with rating from 1 (low) to 5 (high) for five separate areas: signs, fingerspelling, expressiveness, speechreadability, and overall rating. In addition, checklists provide specific information on a number of components in each area and on technical factors such as dress, grooming, and eye contact. The ratings of the five panelists are combined for a composite rating in each of the five areas, and their feedback on components is likewise pooled. The overall rating indicates whether an interpreter is

1: a beginner not ready to interpret,
or has
2: beginning level interpreting skills
3. advanced beginning level interpreting skills
4: intermediate interpreting skills
5: advanced interpreting skills

The ESSE: S-V is a sign-to-voice evaluation of interpreting skills. It includes one middle school level and one high school level student signing PSE/SEE, and one middle school level and one high school level student signing ASL. Each individual on the test tape is presented in a warmup tape. One test tape presents the two PSE/SEE students, and one presents the ASL students. Each segment is approximately three to four minutes in length. The interpreter voices for an audiotape while viewing the stimulus tapes. The audiotape is later rated by a trained panel familiar with the stimulus tapes and with educational settings. Feedback is provided on a number of sign-to-voice skill components, such as accuracy, clarity, smoothness and rhythm, and appropriate vocal intonation.

The ESSE-T is designed for teachers, aides, or others wishing information on their expressive signing skills when signing for themselves. A 60-word screening test establishes the vocabulary level at elementary, intermediate, or advanced levels. The individul is then presented with 20 to 25 test sentences constructed with vocabulary at that level or below and including specific features from American Sign Language such as negation, question marking,

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directionality, or placement. These sentences are presented on a transparency, and the individual videotaped while signing them. The individual is then given a choice of topics appropriate to the school level at which he or she works, and an impromptu presentation on that topic is taped for approximately three minutes. This videotaped sample of signing skills is then rated by a trained panel of five members similar to the rating for interpreters described above. In this way, both a vocabulary sample and a more free-flowing, normal signing sample are obtained.

III. HOW VALID AND RELIABLE ARE THESE EVALUATIONS?

Validity and reliability data are still being collected and are not yet complete; however, preliminary data are available on the ESSE:I and ESSE:T. These were collected in Los Angeles and San Diego, California, and in Iowa. Additional data are being collected in the Bay Area of California and in Oregon during 1990-91.

The ESSE:I shows excellent reliability and validity coefficients. Reliability was measured by correlations between two independent panels and by the rerating of a sample by the same panel after a one year lapse in time. The correlations were as follows:

Rerating, overall rating: .95

Between panel correlations, overall rating: .96
signs: .93
fingerspelling: .96
expressiveness: .92
speechreadability: .87

The validity of the ESSE:I was measured by correlating the overall rating on the evaluation with a rating given a videotaped on-the-job sample of the same individual's performance. This correlated at .94.

Similar correlations were obtained on the ESSE:T. For this evaluation, the correlations were:

Rerating, overall rating: .98

Between panel correlations, overall rating: .93
signs: .95
fingerspelling: .77
expressiveness: .76
speechreadability: .82

The correlation obtained between the overall rating and the on-the-job sample was .71. This lower correlation, as compared to that obtained for interpreters, may have been due to two factors:

1. There was a much smaller range in the ratings of teachers (3 to 4.6) than interpreters (1.4 to 4.6).

2. Vocabulary is not controlled by interpreters; whether in class or in the evaluation, they have to deal with the words used by the teachers who are speaking. Accordingly, the evaluation obtains a comparable sample to what they do on the job. Teachers, however, control the vocabulary used in the classroom; when a teacher is uncertain of a sign, that word is often not used in a classroom situation. On the evaluation, such avoidance of unknown signs is not

possible. Accordingly, the evaluation gets a truer picture of vocabulary than does a classroom videotape; however, the added stress means that teachers are usually less expressive during the evaluation than in a normal classroom situation.

IV. WHAT IS REQUIRED TO TAKE THESE EVALUATIONS?

The cost of the entire evaluation process (ESSE:R and either ESSE:I plus ESSE:S-V or ESSE:T), if administered by the SEE Center, is $200 per person. A minimum of ten individuals are needed for evaluations to be set up. If the evaluations are not administered in San Jose, travel costs for an evaluator to the site of the evaluations are also needed. The materials for administering the evaluations, and a training workshop for evaluation panelists, may also be obtained from the SEE Center by states or programs wishing to conduct their own evaluations. Contact the SEE Center.

The time needed is two hours for the ESSE: R (group administration), 1/2 hour for the ESSE:T (individual administration), and 1 hour for the combined ESSE:I and ESSE: S-V (individual administration). Individuals being evaluated can expect to receive a detailed 6 or 7 page report plus suggestions in approximately six weeks. They may also request a certificate from the SEE Center indicating the evaluation taken and the level attained. Time needed for a training workshop is three full days.

For further information, contact the SEE Center for the Advancement of Deaf Children, Branch Office, Division of Special Education, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192. (408/924-3782 voice, 408/924-3784 TDD)